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RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY 4849

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SENSITIVE
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TAGS: PHUM KIRF PREL PGOV VM
SUBJECT: FUNERAL FOR UBCV PATRIARCH MOVING FORWARD, SOME PROVINCIAL MONKS BARRED FROM TRAVELING

REF: A) HCMC 608 B) O-I # 119 -08

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Post's Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) contacts in Binh Dinh province affirmed today that the late Venerable Thich Huong Quang's funeral will be held on July 11 at Nguyen Thieu monastery, amid heavy police security (Ref A). Senior monks of the banned UBCV organization said they are in charge of the event, despite Vietnamese media reports that the official Vietnam Buddhist Sanga will officiate. Although the UBCV was optimistic that provincial monks would be able to attend the funeral "without difficulties," monks in some provinces have reported that police prevented them from traveling to Binh Dinh. End summary.

UBCV Still in Charge of Funeral

¶2. (SBU) Two close UBCV associates of senior leader Thich Quang Do re-affirmed today that UBCV leaders will officiate at the funeral of former Patriarch Thich Huong Quang on July 11 in Binh Dinh, and not the GVN. The Vietnam Buddhist Sanga (VBS) is also playing a supporting vs. leading role in the ceremonies. Thich Khong Thanh, who is in Binh Dinh province now, reported that Vietnam Buddhist Sanga representatives came to pay their respects to Quang at Nguyen Thieu monastery on July 6th, and thanked senior UBCV leader Thich Quang Do for guiding the organization of the "well prepared" funeral. Thanh said the funeral will be a "tranquil" event devoid of speeches, in accordance with the late Patriarch's wishes.

But Not Allowed to Advertise

¶3. (SBU) Security remains tight around the monastery where Quang lays in state. While Thich Huyen Quang's passing has been noted in numerous GVN-controlled press outlets, the name of the organization has generally been absent, other than in one report that noted that "the UBCV is a religious organization not recognized by the State." Thich Khong Thanh reported from Binh Dinh that police have forbidden local flower shops from printing banners for funeral wreaths with the UBCV's name on them. He added, however, that several wreaths bearing the organization's name were sent to the monastery before authorities interfered. UBCV monks are also closely guarding the funeral notice bearing the UBCV's name in front of the monastery. Several state-run media articles have criticized Thich Quang Do and other UBCV leaders of using the funeral as a means to bolster support for his candidacy as the Fifth Patriarch and legitimacy for the organization.

Some Provincial Monks Prevented From Traveling

¶4. (SBU) Though UBCV leaders gathered in Binh Dinh were previously optimistic about other provincial monks being allowed to travel to the funeral tomorrow (Ref A), several post contacts reported that they were prevented from traveling by local authorities. In nearby Dong Nai province, two UBCV monks said

police stopped them from boarding buses to Binh Dinh shortly after Quang's death was announced. Their monastery continues to be monitored by authorities. In Phu Yen, UBCV monks said police are also posted outside their pagoda, so they will not attempt the trip. In Ba-Ria-Vung Tau, UBCV monks said they were stopped and questioned by authorities while traveling, but "managed their way" to Binh Dinh yesterday. Post will continue to monitor events.

¶5. (SBU) Post is awaiting the HCMC External Relations Office's reply to our diplomatic note requesting an officer be allowed to attend the funeral, though getting to Binh Dinh in time for the 7:00am start time on July 11 is logistically impossible at this point (Ref B). Post will continue to report developments.

¶6. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Hanoi.

FAIRFAX